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A.I.D. and Democratic Development: A Synthesis of Literature and Experience

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SUMMARY

The Democracy Initiative of the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) was announced in December of 1990, confirming a commitment to foster democratic development in developing countries. This synthesis describes efforts made to date to define, refine, and implement the Democracy Initiative through the collaboration of development practitioners, scholars, and policymakers. The principal finding of this synthesis is that there is no blueprint or template suggested by either the Democracy Initiative or political-development theory that defines the path to democracy. Sustainable democratic systems cannot be created in isolation, but are embedded in a complex and interactive process of social and economic development. The course of political development is to be determined within each country, depending upon the unique aspirations, talents, customs, and traditions of the people who will make democracy work.

In the absence of clear answers that prescribe a single course of action, this synthesis seeks to address the challenges faced by development practitioners in their efforts to facilitate the development of democracy within the context of overall social and economic development. One of the principal obstacles is the gap that exists between the theoretical foundations of political development and actual experiences in the field. Improved dialogue and increased information sharing between academics, practitioners, and policymakers are key to bridging this gap. The insights of scholars on the one hand, and practitioners on the other, are summarized separately in the two principal sections of this report.

The first section provides an overview of the literature on the principal issues associated with democratic development, and outlines academic efforts to define democracy and donor efforts to bring together economic- and political-development goals in an overall strategy for development. Consensus emerges among scholars that a democratic system involves the interaction of three basic features: (1) meaningful and extensive political competition for government power; (2) political participation in the selection of leaders and policies through regular and fair elections; and, (3) the existence and respect for civil and political liberties to guarantee the honesty of political competition and participation. A consensus also is growing among international donors that broad-based, economic development is significantly furthered in the long run under political systems that are participatory and open, and that ensure respect for political and civil liberties.

The second section provides a synthesis of preliminary

A.I.D. experiences in democratic development, and addresses many issues that emerge during the design, implementation, and evaluation of A.I.D. programs. These issues are not entirely unique to democratic development. In fact, analysis of common problems confronted reveals that there are many similarities between democratic- and economic-development projects in project design, implementation, and evaluation.

During the design phase, the following issues commonly arise:

- a needs assessment must focus not only on what is needed but what is possible, and must avoid an urban, academic bias in its approach;

- the anticipation of impact requires a deep understanding of the politics, history, economy, and culture of the host country. Even activities that appear highly apolitical or technical have the potential for unanticipated political consequences; and,

- the integration or separation of democratic-development projects from economic-development projects depends upon project or program objectives. Integrated projects combine efforts in the traditional areas of health, education, agriculture or the environment with the goals of democratic development, and these types of projects may be well-suited to address empowerment issues where political activity is too sensitive. "Stand-alone" projects focus upon the political dimensions of underdevelopment, and may be appropriate for reforming structures and practices that inhibit participation, competition, and civil rights. However, to be successful in promoting sustained democratic practices, these projects cannot "stand alone" in the sense of being isolated from broader socio-economic forces.

During the implementation stage, initial impressions from the field note the following concerns:

- A.I.D.'s reliance on indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for grassroots democratic-development work may have important political implications that should be anticipated;

- democratic-development work may be more labor intensive for A.I.D. staff than efforts in other sectors, meriting special consideration during project and program implementation; and,

- the process-oriented, qualitative nature of democratic development must be reconciled with managerial needs for quantitative measures of performance. For the most part, experience reveals that quantitative measures of democracy should be used with care--as tools for monitoring and evaluation in the short to medium term--not as ends in

themselves.

Finally, during the evaluation phase of democratic-development projects or programs, several practical issues commonly emerge:

- evaluations of democratic-development efforts require strict identification of what is being evaluated and why in order to have any meaning or validity;

- integrating qualitative and quantitative indicators of development is essential in order to refine an understanding of the causes, effects, and other linkages among political variables; and,

- successful evaluations of democracy projects and programs are reliant upon good baseline data and the existence of a monitoring and evaluation system that measures reliable indicators often enough to be able to distinguish between temporary setbacks and problematic trends.

Although there are many more unresolved issues in democratic development, those addressed in this synthesis are among the most common sources of discussion, debate, and controversy among A.I.D. Mission staff, policymakers, and academics.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1990, the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) expressed its commitment to foster democracy in developing countries as part of the Agency's Democracy Initiative. Since then, a great deal of effort has been devoted to sharpening understanding of what is meant by democracy, determining how it best can be encouraged in a wide-range of unique environments, and clarifying the role that A.I.D. can play in helping societies in transition achieve their democratic goals.

One of the principal challenges facing development practitioners is bridging the existing gap between the theory and practice of democratic development. This synthesis of scholarly literature and practical experience is intended as a step in that direction. Although there are few clear-cut answers on how to achieve democracy and no blueprints for fostering democratic development, current efforts may benefit from the insights of academics and practitioners. The analysis that follows draws heavily on academic literature and field experiences to:

- provide an overview of the literature on the principal issues associated with democratic development; and,

- synthesize preliminary experiences of A.I.D. Missions in designing, implementing, and evaluating democratic-development programs and projects.

This report primarily is intended to be of use to A.I.D. Missions by providing a preliminary guide to common theoretical issues and application concerns in democratic development. For a more comprehensive investigation of these issues, readers are strongly encouraged to consult the research cited in the following two sections.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: ISSUES IN DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The Importance of Democratic Development to A.I.D.

The policy rationale that has guided the Democracy Initiative may be found in both the references made by practitioners to the developmental advantages of fostering broad-based, economic growth under democracy, and in the foreign policy benefits, frequently cited by policymakers, of promoting democracy among U.S. allies.

In terms of development goals, beneficiary participation has long been believed to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in the use of development assistance. Although the causal relationship between economic development and democracy is tentative (see discussion below), the linkage between the two in achieving broad-based, economic growth increasingly is accepted within the academic and donor communities. As stated in the A.I.D. Democracy and Governance Policy Paper:

> Politics is a development issue. In most developing societies, the character of social, economic and political institutions and values are key constraints to sustained, broadly based economic growth and expanded opportunity. The effective and efficient use of resources depends fundamentally on the strengths and capacities of local institutions, including political institutions.

In terms of foreign policy, one of the most intriguing benefits is the recent finding that democracies do not go to war with one another. Democracies are not necessarily more peaceful than other political entities, but they do not appear to fight one another. Furthermore, the concept of democracy embodies the widely held ideals of freedom of expression, equality, and respect for civil and political freedoms. These characteristics are understood to improve the likelihood of peaceful and harmonious international relations between the United States and the rest of the world. Since the end of the Cold War, countries making the transition to democracy increasingly are seeking assistance in establishing representative political systems. In responding to these welcome requests for support, A.I.D. possesses many of the requisite development skills and capacity to provide short- and long-term assistance to emerging democracies when compared with other agencies in the U.S. Government.

Therefore, development and foreign policy benefits provide the justification for A.I.D.'s involvement in democratic development. In the following section, definitions and concepts surrounding democratic development will be explored.

Defining Democracy and Democratic Development

Democracy and democratic development are difficult to define. Of considerable importance to development practitioners are three problems. First, there is a gap between the ideals associated with democracy and the reality of any democratic system in existence. For the field worker, this means that working towards an ideal vision of democracy is likely to be unrealistic. Second, a definition of democracy must be adaptable and allow for variations according to national custom and tradition. Hence the development practitioner must be able to identify the central features that all democratic systems share, while dismissing superficial and extraneous characteristics. Third, the theoretical foundations for defining democracy offer no sure practical guidance for the development practitioner involved in democratic development. Moreover, defining democracy is very different from figuring out how to achieve it. Academic research regarding the nature of democracy reflects these complexities.

The gap between a democratic ideal and democratic realities was addressed most comprehensively by Robert Dahl, who applied the term polyarchy to existing political systems that approached, but failed to achieve, the utopian ideals of democracy. Reasoning that no observable political system has ever achieved all of the ideals of democracy, and that the institutional guarantees that characterize democracies may exist to differing degrees across variables, Dahl noted that the social scientist must distinguish between real political behavior and theoretical ideals. In defining democracy, Dahl and other theorists such as Joseph Schumpeter, Seymour Martin Lipset, Juan Linz, and Larry Diamond proposed the following as the three central features of polyarchy:

- Competition--referring to meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups, particularly political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals, and excluding the use of force.

- Political participation--involving the selection of leaders and policies through regular and fair elections, such that no major adult social group is excluded.

- Civil and political liberties--meaning the existence and respect for political and civil liberties, considered essential in order to guarantee the honesty of political competition and participation. These liberties include freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to

form and join organizations (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1990, 6-7).

In an attempt to put forth a view of democracy that allows for adaptation according to local custom, Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl try to portray the generic meaning of modern political democracy, without associating it exclusively with a particular set of rules and institutions, and without confining it to a specific culture or level of development. They propose that "modern democracy offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and values--associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual, and that all are integral to its practice" (Schmitter & Karl 1991). They argue that no single set of actual institutions, practices of values embodies democracy. Instead, they understand all democracies to consist of unique combinations of the following components: consensus, participation, access, responsiveness, majority-rule, parliamentary sovereignty, party government, pluralism, federalism, presidentialism, and checks and balances.

There are several problems associated with relying upon these definitions for guidance in democratic development. First, the central features of democracy are quite difficult to measure, and the extent of their existence within a society may differ in degree. Second, the features of democracy are highly interdependent, and no one or two features alone are sufficient for a democratic system. For example, regular elections and high levels of voter participation were common in most of the formerly Communist countries, yet many significant civil and political liberties were ignored or abused there. In such nations, restrictions on the media, free expression, and association have enabled those in power to maintain control of government through what appear on the surface to be inclusive and competitive means. Finally, defining democracy is distinct from creating a strategy for democratic development. Although practitioners might be tempted to move from definition, to measurement, to strategy, the features of democracy identified in common definitions--competition, political participation, and civil and political liberties--do not prescribe a set of actions that might be taken to strengthen democratic development. Supporting competition or enhancing political participation may seem elusive goals for development practitioners.

Clearly, there are a variety of definitions of democracy and democratic development; however, the differences among definitions are less striking than are their commonalities. To be democratic, a society requires a high degree of personal and political freedoms, the institutional basis to conduct free and fair elections, an openness to competition for political power, and the ability of elected officials to obtain meaningful political power. The principal gap to be confronted by practitioners is in understanding how to move from these common elements of a definition to a strategy that outlines the role that donors can play in promoting democratic change.

Donors and Democratic Development

The role that donors and other external actors can play in affecting democratic outcomes abroad is relatively unexplored in academic literature. Donors and academics have focused research efforts upon understanding the causal relationship between economic development and democracy, rather than upon explaining how democracies work and what types of interventions will promote democratic development.

Unlike economic development--which has well-defined theories, definitions, and contending schools of thought offering explanations of how to best promote economic growth--the process of democratic development lacks a theoretical and empirical foundation to guide decision making. No well-defined theories of political development exist that apply empirical evidence to test the merits of one strategy versus another. As a result, donor efforts in and approaches to democratic development differ substantially.

To begin to bridge the gap between academic theories on the nature of democracy and donor interest in promoting democratic development, the research findings of two groups are presented below: (1) academia, and (2) the international donor community, including the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and A.I.D.

Academic Research

Scholars of democracy have long observed an association between economic and democratic development; however, it is the exact nature of this association that remains ambiguous. The academic research discussed in this section focused upon the question: is economic development a prerequisite for democracy?

Early studies of the relationship hypothesized that economic development was an important precondition for democracy. In line with the modernization school of development theory, scholars of democracy in the 1950s and 1960s identified a correlation between levels of education, urbanization, industrialization, and income. They concluded that economic growth set the stage for subsequent democratic development (Lerner 1958, Lenski 1966, Lipset 1959).

With the advent of dependency theory, a new interpretation of the relationship was proposed by academics. The most prominent author on this issue, Guillermo O'Donnell, found that democracy and economic development may in some cases prove incompatible (O'Donnell 1973). Central to O'Donnell's argument was the point that aggregate measures of economic growth (such as those used in earlier studies) were insensitive to the more important political concern of the distribution of the benefits of growth.

Over the past decade, the notion that economic development is a precondition for democratic political change has encountered increased scrutiny in academic circles. Political theorist Samuel Huntington wrote that though "economic development compels the modification or abandonment of traditional political institutions; it does not determine what political system will replace them"(Huntington 1984, 201). Instead, he argued persuasively that the political system that emerges to replace traditional political institutions is shaped by noneconomic and external forces.

Research by Stephan Haggard further refines the linkage between economic development and democracy by differentiating between upper-, middle-, and lower-income countries (Haggard 1990). He shows that the correlation between democracy and economic development is observable at the extreme high and low ends of the income scale. However, among middle-income countries, those in the upper-middle income group tend to have lower levels of political rights and civil liberties than do those belonging to the lower-middle income category. In a series of case studies on the transition to democracy, Haggard found that the majority of transitions were prompted by a period of economic crisis--rather than economic growth--that served to destabilize the government.

This is not to say that there is no relationship between democracy and economic development, but only that it is not a clear causal association. A study by Kenneth A. Bollen and Robert W. Jackman compared economic and noneconomic factors for their relative influence upon democratic development and found that the level of economic development did appear to be the most significant determinant of democracy (Bollen and Jackman 1985). However, this is not a steadfast rule, nor of much prescriptive use in the field.

Research By Donors

Recent research by international donor organizations has built upon scholarly findings. Donor studies now focus less upon the causal relationship between economic and democratic development, and more upon the effects of combining democracy and economic development. As a result, donor-sponsored research is increasingly exploring the likelihood that broad-based, economic growth is significantly furthered under political systems that are participatory, open, and that ensure respect for political and civil liberties.

The UNDP focuses upon the correlation between human development and human freedom and argues that the two are inextricably linked. In its 1991 Human Development Report, the UNDP maintains that "The real objective of development is to increase people's development choices. Income is one aspect of these choices--and an extremely important one--but it is not the sum-total of human existence. Health, education, a good physical environment and freedom ... may be just as important." The 1990

and 1991 versions of the report call for economic growth that is participatory, well-distributed, and sustainable. Borrowing from the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the 1991 report advocates development of the people, by the people, for the people.

The World Bank's position on democratic development is guided by its mandate, laid down in the Articles of Agreement, that prohibits direct interference or intervention in host country political affairs that do not have a significant economic effect. Therefore, the World Bank literature concentrates upon the importance of governance in managing social and economic development. Governance, as defined by the World Bank, is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Good governance is considered to consist of the following three dimensions:

- Accountability--holding public officials responsible for their actions;

- Predictability and the Rule of Law--implying that rules and regulations are clear and applied evenhandedly, and that lines of authority are clear; and,

- Transparency--referring to availability and access to information from public and private sources, and openness in decision making processes (World Bank 1991a).

The World Bank's World Development Report 1991 cautiously assesses the importance of political and civil liberties in achieving economic development. The results of a World Bank regression analysis for measures of overall development show that political and civil liberties are positively associated with measures of welfare improvements, such as women's education, overall education, and declines in infant mortality. These results are presented in the table below, demonstrating that there is a strong relationship between income growth, education levels, and declining infant mortality; between female education levels, changes in female education levels, and declining infant mortality; and between political and civil liberties, achievements in male and female education, and infant mortality decline. Although the results of regression do not show the lines of causation, they do suggest that these components of development are interdependent (World Development Report 1991, 50).

Table: Correlation Matrix for Measures of Overall Development, 1973-1987

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Growth	1.00	0.30	0.12*	0.23	0.31	0.42	0.37	0.19*
2. Decline in infant mortality *a	1.00	0.27	0.41	0.29	0.67	0.71	0.59	

3. Change in education	1.00	0.92	-0.18*	0.30	0.25	0.32*
4. Change in female education	1.00	0.22	0.52	0.48	0.28	
5. Change in female-male education gap	1.00	0.55	0.56	0.39		
6. Education level	1.00	0.98	0.57			
7. Female education level	1.00	0.63				
8. Political and civil liberties	1.00					

Note: Numbers are period averages; data are for a sample of sixty-eight economies. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at least at the 10 percent level, except for those marked with an asterisk (*).

a. Because of low data quality, these data cover only the period 1973-1984.

Sources: World Bank, 1991 World Development Report, p. 50. Political and civil liberties data from Gastil 1989.

Like other donors, A.I.D.'s efforts to foster democratic development lack a firm, theoretically grounded strategy. Instead, A.I.D.'s approach offers categories of interventions, consisting of the following four activity areas:

- Strengthening democratic representation--increasing the participation of citizens in forming and implementing public policy; supporting the establishment of peaceful and stable forms of political competition; promoting the free flow of information.

- Supporting human rights--helping to establish a framework of law and legal procedures that protect the integrity of the person and the exercise of basic rights.

- Promoting lawful governance--helping to establish formal constraints on the actions of civil servants, the military, and policymakers; supporting legal processes that contribute to peaceful social and economic interaction.

- Encouraging democratic values--supporting the emergence of the basic democratic values of tolerance for diverse opinions, political compromise, acceptance of majority rule, respect for minority and gender rights, and supremacy of civil authority over the military (A.I.D. 1991a).

A.I.D. has devoted less attention than the UNDP or the World Bank to discerning the quantitative or empirical nature of the relationship between democracy and economic development. It may be that the foreign policy and development policy justifications

for working in democratic development make less significant the issue of the causal relationship between economic development and democracy. As expressed in A.I.D.'s Democracy and Governance Policy Paper:

> Democracy does not guarantee successful development, but it can be highly supportive of efforts to address development problems effectively. It helps prevent abuses of power and political systems which retard broadly based economic growth and social systems.

Having addressed some of the often-debated theoretical and conceptual issues surrounding democratic development, the second and final section will explore the practical issues associated with fostering democracy in the field.

A SYNTHESIS OF PRELIMINARY EXPERIENCES IN DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Numerous issues emerge during the design, implementation, and evaluation stages of democratic-development programs. Although there are few steadfast rules in fostering democracy, and there is absolutely no blueprint for a single approach, the experiences of development practitioners do illustrate several preliminary lessons learned. A number of these lessons are not unique to democratic development, but instead are quite similar to those encountered in economic-development programs. Moreover, several difficulties common in economic-development work are further accentuated when working in the political arena. A selection of issues that arise in designing, implementing, and evaluating democratic development are discussed briefly below.

Design Issues

Four common concerns during the design phase of program development merit review: (1) assessing needs; (2) anticipating impact; (3) integrating or separating democratic development projects from economic-development projects; and (4) involving outside participants in the design process, including host-country participants, other multilateral donors, and U.S. Government actors.

Conducting a Needs Assessment

Conducting a needs assessment for democratic development can be quite complicated for a variety of reasons. Without theoretical guidance on how to identify priority areas for democratic-development work, needs assessment may be dominated by procedural problems. First, the issue of human resources

available to conduct assessments is of concern. In general, A.I.D. lacks enough professional staff trained in political science or related fields to conduct needs assessments in-house. However, when outside professionals carry out the needs assessment, it is often difficult to translate the assessment into an operationally feasible plan. In order to avoid this problem, Mission staff stress the importance of a clear work plan for the assessment, one that outlines expectations.

Second, the issue of what is needed versus what is possible is frequently confronted by program planners. For example, although there is a great need for work to improve civil-military relations in many countries, it is often one of the most explosive and sensitive political areas. Yet, simply ignoring this critical element and focusing on other efforts may not suffice, as evidenced by recent experiences in Haiti.

Third, the issue of how host-country nationals participate in the needs assessment effort is a common subject of debate. It is clear that local participation is essential to gain insight into the political dynamics at play, identify a wider range of local initiatives, and anticipate areas of political will or resistance. However, practitioners also caution that local participants' safety may be jeopardized if associated with politically volatile activities.

Fourth, needs assessments can be subject to an elitist and urban bias when conducted by scholars and government officials who stay within the capital--or at least major cities--and focus their interviews on local elites and bureaucrats. Hence, it is critical that the A.I.D. Mission design a needs assessment that inventories the range of grassroots initiatives and opportunities in democratic development. Moreover, it is essential that project planners hear a multitude of opinions, and attend to gender, ethnic, racial, religious, and regional diversity.

Anticipating Impact

A second difficulty in the design of democratic-development programs is anticipating the impact of a selected intervention. Every activity in democratic development has a series of political repercussions that must be taken into account in the design process, requiring a deep understanding of the politics, history, and culture of the host country. Even activities that appear highly apolitical or technical in focus have the potential for unanticipated political consequences. For example, establishing a congressional library may be quite controversial and encounter resistance if legislators resist sharing legislative information, or fear loss of leverage with colleagues. Hence, project designers are required to confront the political implications of any activity, rather than blindly seek technical solutions to political problems.

Integrated Versus Stand-Alone Democratic-Development Projects

A third design issue involves deciding whether a distinct democracy project is most appropriate, or whether to integrate democracy into other development projects. An integrated-democracy project would take the same approach as the participatory-development and popular-participation techniques long advocated by A.I.D. and other donors. For example, integrated projects might include health, education, agricultural, or environmental projects with a component for strengthening local organizations. In contrast, stand-alone democratic-development projects focus upon the political arena, including the typical list of activities under the Democracy Initiative (for example, constitutional development, human rights, the administration of justice, decentralization, legislative development, political parties, elections support, training in political leadership, labor unions, and civic education) (Hansen 1990).

Opinions on integrated versus stand-alone democracy projects are varied across A.I.D. Missions and Regional Bureaus. One argument against integration is that a project would have too many objectives, or perhaps mutually exclusive goals. An argument against stand-alone democracy projects is that their goals might be at odds with economic-development efforts, and as a result, economic-development objectives may be undermined. Although both arguments have merit, the decision to integrate or isolate democratic-development projects from economic-development efforts should depend upon program goals. Integrated projects may be well-suited to addressing empowerment issues in the areas of health, education, agriculture, and the environment. Stand-alone projects may be appropriate for the reform of structures that inhibit participation, competition, and political and civil rights.

The Involvement of Other Actors

A final design issue that merits review is the involvement of outside participants in the design process, including host-country government officials, other U.S. Government actors, and multilateral donors. Although the differing agendas of participants may sidetrack or derail the democratic-development process, no program can be successful without the cooperation of interested parties and stake-holders. In fact, a 1990 A.I.D. presentation to the Development Assistance Committee noted that Latin America's most successful and effective A.I.D.-funded projects were designed and proposed by local institutions or by U.S. organizations with established relationships and credibility in the region. Conversely, the projects that have faced the most trouble were usually designed by A.I.D. staff or consultants, with less than adequate collaboration with host-country institutions.

This is not to imply that collaboration is without numerous difficulties. When involving host-country actors, the Mission is

required to elicit enough support to implement the program, yet must guard against biases in favor of a single political organization, socioeconomic group, or institutional actor. The agenda of other donors in the program design may diverge from that of A.I.D. Even within a U.S. embassy, there can be a conflict between the longer-term developmental priorities of A.I.D. compared with the typically short-term foreign policy objectives of the rest of the U.S. embassy staff. The lesson learned by Mission staff in regard to involving a variety of actors in the design process is that country teams and interagency collaboration can be extremely helpful, but to ignore their participation and interest in the process can be detrimental.

Implementation Issues

Three issues in the implementation of democratic-development programs are discussed briefly below: (1) relying on indigenous NGOs; (2) meeting the labor-intensive requirements of democratic-development work; and (3) reconciling the process-oriented, qualitative nature of democratic development with quantitative measures of success. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but is based upon initial impressions from the field.

Reliance on NGOs

The issues related to reliance on indigenous NGOs for work in democratic development are relatively unexplored. Over the past decade, in the traditional areas of education, health, and agriculture, A.I.D. increasingly has relied upon NGOs to work at the grassroots level. Over the past few decades within Asia and Latin America, communities of politically active local NGOs have emerged in the form of professional associations, sectarian groups, public-interest foundations, and private think tanks. Now, these groups increasingly are becoming intermediaries between A.I.D., international NGOs, and grassroots organizations. In Africa, because the indigenous NGO sector has, in many cases, less than a decade of experience, A.I.D. reliance on local NGOs, and their dependency on A.I.D. funds in return, may have important political implications. Moreover, all NGOs are susceptible to becoming overly dependent on A.I.D. resources for both democratic-development and economic-development activities. The risk is even more pronounced in democratic-development work where opportunities for cost recovery are more scarce.

The danger of dependency is multifaceted, and as with economic- and social-development work, concern for NGO sustainability is prevalent in democratic-development efforts as well. A.I.D. financial support may in some cases undermine the goal of strengthening NGOs. The acceptance of A.I.D. funding might compromise the perceived autonomy of the NGO community. NGOs can play an important role in democratic development by influencing public policy decisions and by exerting pressure for governments

to be accountable. However, this capacity may be undermined if NGOs are seen to advocate the interests of the United States, rather than represent the concerns of NGO members and constituents. Similarly, if A.I.D. funds are made conditional upon either the politics of a country or the politics of the NGO, the NGOs may be subject to local suspicion, and also face the loss of funds if A.I.D. discontinues funding in a given country. Either alternative may undermine NGO development. Finally, donors must carefully assess the ability of indigenous NGOs to absorb large infusions of assistance for democratic-development purposes. For example, African indigenous NGOs may be less capable than counterparts in other regions to productively absorb and administer large infusions of A.I.D. funds for democratic-development purposes.

Based upon these considerations, field personnel might try to look for alternative means to support NGOs other than direct funding, such as training in advocacy skills, technical assistance, or support for internal NGO evaluations in order to learn from past or present experiences. Additionally, aid channeled through a U.S. private voluntary organization that acts as an intermediary to several indigenous NGOs may prove less vulnerable to the risks noted above. Reliance on NGOs is an integral part of democratic development, but like all democratic-development activities, the outcome of the reliance must be anticipated.

The Labor-Intensive Nature of Democratic Development Work

A second issue of concern in the implementation of democratic-development activities is the labor-intensive nature of democratic-development work. When compared with other sectors, implementing a democracy program is unique and particularly challenging for several reasons. First, high levels of reliance on U.S. or host-country contractors is less desirable in democratic-development work than in other areas because the establishment of trustworthy and productive working relationships between Mission staff and host-country government counterparts is key. Second, in other sectors, A.I.D. staff has a track record of performance and a set of contacts that facilitate implementing programs. For democratic development, Mission staff is frequently breaking new ground, possibly requiring additional human resources during the implementation phase of democracy programs.

The Process-Oriented, Qualitative Nature of Democratic Development

A third issue that presents difficulties during the evaluation and implementation stages of program development is the process-oriented, qualitative nature of democratic development. Democracy programs must be subject to the same

monitoring and evaluation standards as other A.I.D. programs; however, it is difficult to reconcile the qualitative features of democracy with the requirement for quantitative measures of performance. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of a set of theoretically grounded, well-understood indicators that measure meaningful progress toward democratic goals. Although the measurement problem is discussed in greater detail as an evaluation issue below, it is also a critical implementation issue. Project managers must resist the tendency to let the achievement of quantitative indicators drive management. At the same time, some measures are essential in order to determine whether the project is heading in the right direction, or requires modification. The lesson learned here is to use quantitative measures with caution--as a tool for monitoring and evaluation in the short to medium term--not as ends in themselves.

Evaluation Issues

Issues in the evaluation of democratic-development programs are some of the most controversial in Washington and in the field. Reasons for this controversy are the long-term nature of political change, the theoretical assumptions inherent in existing tools of measurement, the interdependent nature of democratic conditions, the lack of understanding of the cause and effect relationship among political variables, and the aforementioned qualitative nature of democratic development. These issues that are unique to democratic development remain unresolved. Instead of focusing upon abstract debates, this section highlights considerations of a more practical nature, that are intended to be of use to field personnel currently tasked with evaluating democratic-development programs. Practitioners frequently experience anxiety when confronted with evaluating the results of democratic-development projects for many of the aforementioned reasons. However, a number of the issues confronted in evaluating democratic development are common to all development efforts. Three basic and practical evaluation issues are discussed below: (1) determining what to evaluate and why; (2) integrating qualitative and quantitative measures; and, (3) determining the frequency of measurement.

Determining What to Evaluate and Why

Determining what to evaluate and why is the first issue of an evaluation. For example, one must know if measures of project performance are to be used for internal project management, Mission program evaluation, Regional or Central Bureau assessments of lessons learned, senior Washington management programmatic decisions, or the Agency's reports to the U.S. Congress. The selection of an evaluation strategy and appropriate measures is dependent upon different information requirements. For the purposes of project monitoring and evaluation, indicators that measure short-term outputs can judge

the project's success in delivering services, providing technical assistance, or supporting groups and institutions. For example, if a Mission is working toward the goal of free and fair elections, output indicators might include: the provision of training to an electoral tribunal, the establishment of a system to investigate electoral fraud, the number of international observers sent to monitor elections, or the quantity of election equipment delivered. This information enables project managers to monitor and evaluate the use of resources, but does not focus on whether the elections were indeed free and fair.

A second tier of indicators is required to measure progress toward democracy, because output-level indicators do not measure impact. Impact indicators are useful in the medium to long term for assessing changes in democratic conditions. Using the above example of elections activities, one impact indicator would be holding free and fair elections. Impact indicators are more useful than output indicators for reporting at a level that has meaning for the Regional Bureau or the Agency as a whole. Yet, as with any national-level indicator of development, attributing impact to the A.I.D. intervention is difficult. However, precise attribution is not required for democracy programs any more than for other A.I.D. programs. Rather, association buttressed by reasonable empirical evidence of a qualitative and--to the extent possible--quantitative nature is sufficient. Evaluators need to distinguish between measuring the success of an A.I.D. project or program and measuring the impact of the A.I.D. program on democracy. Neither A.I.D. nor the Mission can be expected to engineer democratic outcomes, only to make progress in creating an enabling environment for its practice. Hence, in order to have any meaning or validity, evaluation efforts require strict identification of what is being evaluated and why.

Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Indicators

A second issue, related to the first, involves integrating qualitative and quantitative indicators of democratic development. Democracy is best described as a series of broad, qualitative pattern changes, not solely or necessarily a selected list of quantitative indicators. Improvements in one area of the political system do not necessarily equate to progress toward democracy. For example, improving a judicial system in a totalitarian country will not result in a fair, democratic judicial system, but rather in an efficient totalitarian judiciary. There is no empirically proven model that demonstrates that factor X plus factor Y plus factor Z equal democracy, nor a clear understanding of the exact relationships between such factors. As a result, evaluation must often rely heavily upon qualitative information in order to contribute empirical evidence to the understanding of causes, effects, and linkages among variables.

The Frequency of Evaluation

A third issue in evaluating democratic development is the frequency of evaluation. Although it is relatively simple to distinguish between short- and long-term indicators and objectives, it is far more difficult to identify real and meaningful intervals for measuring progress on democratic development for several reasons. Short-term setbacks are bound to occur as part of the long-term process of change. Moreover, progress may not appear progressive when using certain indicators. For example, public confidence in government officials may be extremely low following an anticorruption campaign, or preceding elections. Similarly, voter turnout may decline in the newly democratic Eastern European region, for example, because under Communist rule, electoral participation was obligatory. The experiences of previous evaluations of democracy projects and programs highlight the importance of good baseline data, supplemented by a monitoring and evaluation system that measures reliable indicators often enough to be able to distinguish trends.

CONCLUSION

As this synthesis shows, neither the Democracy Initiative nor existing political theory prescribe a course of action for fostering democracy in developing countries. Although this may reassure some people while unnerving others, it undoubtedly challenges all who are involved in the process of democratization to seek unique and innovative approaches.

The Democracy Initiative is intended to state policy, not to serve as an action plan or a theoretical model of democratic development. There is no single conceptual model to guide practitioners, but, instead, many theoretical approaches to describing democracy. Therefore, the form that democratic development activities assume is dependent upon the chosen approach.

Often, development practitioners believe that "the answers" exist within the realm of theory, and that knowledge of academic research will resolve the principal issues in design, implementation, and evaluation. Actually, a better understanding of the democratic-development process first requires bridging the existing gap between theory and practice. Improved communication between practitioners and theorists, combined with increased sharing of empirical and theoretical evidence, are two additional areas in which A.I.D. may contribute to a greater understanding of the democratic-development process in the near future.

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